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not to feed him.'[1] Statements which would readily account for the suckling of children by old women. In these circumstances it is not surprising that the act of suckling has become symbolic of the mother's generosity in Bemba literature and daily speech. Speaking of the son-to-mother relation men say in sentimental tones, 'How should a mother refuse her child anything when she has suckled him with her breasts'? Praying to his great ancestress Bwalya Cabala, Chief Mwamba said, 'You who suckled us and carried us on your back in a skin'. The legal dues of the mother's family are sometimes based on this service the woman has done for the child, and only a sister can act as a substitute for a dead mother.

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The belief that the breasts give comfort rather than nourishment is correlated with the practice of feeding infants with supplementary foods, The Bemba deny entirely that a baby can live even for a few weeks on its mother's milk alone. From the third or fourth week the infant is fed with a thin milk gruel known as *umusunga*. This is made in the first place by stirring a little flour into warm water[2] held in the hollow of the hand, and later by throwing a small handful of flour into boiling water and stirring until a smooth paste of the consistency of gruel results. It is often sour since it is considered bad to throw away remains of gruel blessed by the spirits. This *umusunga* is literally rammed down the baby's throat in spite of its protests. However the child may scream, splutter, or cough up the food, it is relentlessly forced down again, pushed with the mother's fore-finger or held in the baby's mouth while the food is stroked down his throat, as a European may force a dog to swallow a pill. This behaviour of the mother shows how important she considers the additional food. In every other respect she indulges every whim of her baby, suckling him whenever he wishes and giving him whatever he cries for, but on this one point she is firm. 'How can the child get strong if he has nothing but the breast?' parents will say indignantly. They criticize severely European mothers, who suckle their babies for six months without additional food: 'Look at those white women! They have their cupboards full of tins of sugar and flour, and yet they grudge the

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[1] *Amenshi fye epela! Kuonka te kuikuta yo! Kumupela ibele pefye ni kumunashya ku mutima epela!*

[2] Not boiling water for fear lumps would be formed. Girls at Lubwa training school are taught to simmer the gruel a little.

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[facing p. 90]

The Bemba hearth.
(Photograph posed in roofless house.)

Making a cooking-pot.

The finished pot set to dry before firing.

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who can afford to use European soap[1] delight to do so, and laundry work, in particular ironing, is considered a fashionable employment and one that is a mark of wealth and status. As such, it is chiefly in the hands of the men, many of whom learn to iron in domestic service. The husbands as the wage-earners are in any case considered sole owners of both their own and their wives' clothes,[2] and when the young man can acquire a bit of soap he likes to wash and iron in public outside his hut, surrounded by an admiring crowd of small boys. Thus the washing of clothes is women's work in the old-fashioned villages, but a male occupation under more modern conditions.

Women care for their children devotedly, but rarely give up any time to them exclusively. Babies are washed with warm water and massaged each morning and fed with gruel twice a day (cf. p. 69), but otherwise they are slung on their mothers' backs wherever they go—to work or to a beer-drink—but are not definitely 'amused' for any period of time or taken for walks. Small sisters do most of the work of supervising the younger children, and thus relieve the mothers.

Preparation of Meals.

If the housework proper, as we have described it, is not a very heavy drain on a woman's time, the preparation of meals and all the associated activities are far longer and more complicated than in our society. Wood for the fire has to be collected daily, or every two days, and this is woman's work. A man fetches wood for his chief, or for a European when required to. For his wife he will only cut down a suitable tree stem on the way back from gardening, and leave it for her to pick up on her return. She usually carries a bundle of dried wood six to eight feet long on her head. When a village is newly built dry firewood is plentiful near home, but in two or three years' time the supply is almost exhausted and the phrase 'she has gone for firewood' (*Aya ku nkuni*) may mean an expedition of an hour or so. On the copper belt the problem has already become acute and well-paid Africans employ servants to gather their wood, or try to buy faggots in the native market —one of the causes of the great increase in the cost of living in urban areas.

[1] This practically only occurs in the neighbourhood of a white store.

[2] He wears her clothes whenever he likes, and I have seen men strip their wives as a dramatic gesture in a quarrel threatening to lead to divorce.

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[754] witchcraft, handled by people believed to have supernatural powers.

(ii) *The magic influence of sex, blood and fire* which, when brought
789 into wrongful contact with each other, are thought to be highly
831 dangerous to every Bemba, but particularly to babies and young
372 children, who are believed to be vulnerable to so many dangers; and to chiefs, on whom the prosperity of the land is held to depend. This system of beliefs is extremely complex, and yet it is necessary to try to understand it, if the meaning of the chisungu is to be grasped. The dogma relating sex and fire is the *idée maîtresse* behind most of the ritual behaviour of the Bemba.

834 Briefly speaking, sex relations according to Bemba dogma make
784 a couple 'hot'. In this state it is dangerous for them to approach
783 the ancestral spirits in any rite of prayer or sacrifice; and any chief
622 or headman who attempted to perform such a ceremony without purification would run the risk of bringing disaster on his district.
[793] The chief's shrines are guarded by old women or hereditary priests who keep sex taboos. For the chief to be casual in keeping sex taboos, or to approach his ancestors without purification is 'to spoil the land' (*ukuonaula icalo*).

831 All persons of sex maturity are in fact distinguished by a special
372 term (*wa kuboko*) and are excluded from a number of rites on the
784 ground that they are 'hot', or are likely to be 'hot'. Such people
783 can pollute the fireplace of a hut by touching it, and then a baby
● 854 fed with gruel cooked on this fire might sicken and die. Parents
846 who do not purify themselves after intercourse run the risk of killing their children by accidentally touching the family hearth. Adulterers are more dangerous still, as they cannot purify themselves since the necessary rite can only be carried out by husband and wife. Small babies and their mothers are therefore kept away from beer drinks where 'bad' people congregate drinking round the fire without care. The baby's gruel is often cooked on a separate hearth and in a separate pot. The art of Bemba motherhood in fact consists very largely in guarding children from danger from fire. A newly born baby is 'unripe' (*mubishi*) and is in a specially precarious position until it has been 'taken' by its parents (*ukupoka umwana*) by an act of intercourse and the lighting of new fire, when it is a few months old. To save the baby, it must be 'brought to the fire' by being held over the flames of a doctored

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fire when it is first placed to the breast, or when the cord falls off (*ukumwalawila*). If its father is away and the ceremony of 'taking the child' cannot take place, the baby is given medicine (*umuti wa lueshya*). The mother and the midwife extinguish the old fire, mud the hut and light a new fire. Then they carry the baby to the men's shelter where there are presumably many youths 'with heat' or 'with bad things', or to a kitchen where the people have been known not to have done the purification ceremony. In this dangerous company, they give the baby gruel cooked on the new fire to make it immune. The rite of *ukumukokotola* is a ceremonial spitting of raw food on the baby by a menstruating woman so that the baby can be safely touched by a woman who is in this condition. All these methods are believed to secure immunity on homoeopathic principles.

The chief's sacred fire, the fire of the land, must be protected with even greater care. It is placed in a separate hut and watched by a senior wife, past child bearing. The chief's food is usually cooked by a man and not a woman.

To remove the dangers due to sex intercourse a special ceremony is required and this is one which can only be performed by a legally married couple. Hence the close links between the rules of ritual and those governing marriage ties, and the great importance of magic belief in determining the strength of the marital relationship. At marriage each girl is presented by her paternal aunt with a miniature pot about 2½ inches in diameter which must be guarded with the utmost secrecy. With this the purification rite is carried out. It is filled with water and placed on the fire, man and wife each holding the rim. Water from the pot is then poured by the wife on to her husband's hands, and some say on to the wife's as well. New 'pure' fire is then relit either by means of fire-sticks, or, as is usual nowadays, with matches. This apparently simple rite is the essential act which removes the condition of hotness from the body of man and wife and renders them free to touch a hearth with impunity or to approach the ancestral spirits. Some say that it used to be performed after each sex act and others that it was merely done before some ceremony of special undertaking such as harvesting. It is still spoken of with the utmost secrecy and shyness and still survives even in the face of strong opposition from

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A young mother's pride in her first baby
(See p. 47)

[facing p. 48]

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since many of them have been given to their husbands before puberty and some form of intercourse, usually incomplete, has taken place. They have also acted as nurses of their young brothers and sisters to an extent that is rare in most sections of our society, and they are therefore familiar with the elements of the rather simple system of child care practised in this tribe.

What then do the Bemba girls learn in their chisungu or in what sense can they be said to learn?

First of all they learn a secret language or rather, secret terms. The different *mbusa* have names supposedly, at any rate, known only to initiated women. For instance I was taken some way into the bush to be told with every precaution to ensure secrecy that 'we women' call whitewash *lota*, an archaic term, instead of *pemba*, the more common word. Girls also learn the chisungu songs. The doggerel rhymes associated with the *mbusa* (see Appendix B) are some of them widely sung, but they have a number of secret or semi-secret meanings apart from the overt one. What seems to the educationist to be the most mumbo-jumbo and useless aspect of the whole affair may actually constitute one of the most prized items of information to the people concerned.

Girls are also said to learn the secret language of marriage. The Bemba language abounds in phraseology with hidden or allusive meaning. It is part and parcel of court etiquette and it is used in other special social relationships and in particular between husband and wife. 'We married people' said a male informant 'know how to say things that a young boy and girl would not understand. That is what we want a girl to learn at her chisungu'. The intimacy that surrounds the physical relation of husband and wife, described as 'the secret things within the house' seems to the European to be curious in view of the lack of other forms of intimate companionship between them, but it is evident that it is the special phraseology and the taboos of married life that a man hopes his wife will learn in the chisungu. The candidates also have to learn the rather complex sequence of the rites themselves which represents a considerable effort of memory in communities without a written language.

Nor does it matter if the girl herself does not see the whole of the ceremony which is performed over her. It is a form of education

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Children go to the fields with their mother when very young
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[facing p. 176]

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They learn to grind the millet and cook at a very early age
(See p. 126)

[facing p. 177]